

Hanging an Axe



Inevitably, the wooden handle to your trusty axe will break one day. You'll be merrily swinging your axe – either splitting stove wood for the approaching winter or mercy-killing that old storm-damaged red maple in the corner field – and “crack!” . . . the handle lets go.

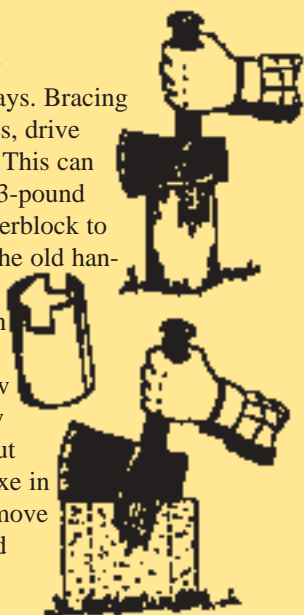
To the uninitiated, a broken axe handle signals that it's time to buy a new axe; but to the resourceful woodsman or woodswoman, it's simply time to hang a new handle.

Here's how:

Remove the old handle.

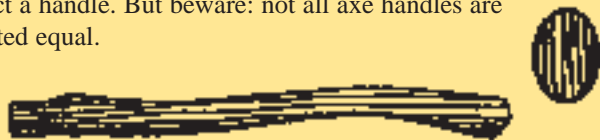
This can be done one of two ways. Bracing the axe head on two opposing sides, drive the handle out from the top down. This can be done with a wood chisel and a 3-pound hammer, using a steel pipe or cinderblock to brace the axe head while tapping the old handle with the chisel.

If you're not in a hurry, you can place the entire axe head and handle stub in the woodstove for a few minutes. The wood will burn away and any remnants can be tapped out easily. (Caution: Don't leave the axe in any longer than is necessary to remove the wood from the axe – you could affect the temper of the steel.)



Select a new handle.

Bring your clean axe head to your local hardware store and select a handle. But beware: not all axe handles are created equal.



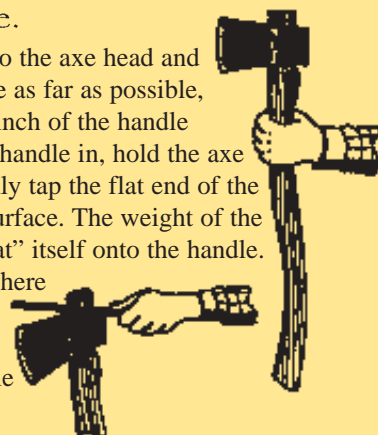
- Species: Most handles are made of hickory though some are white ash. Stick with the hickory; it's considered the better species for impact tools.

- Length: A 2 1/4-pound axe head (some consider this a “boy's axe”) will take a 28-inch handle, and a 3 1/2-pound axe will take a 32-inch-long handle. Although most factory-made handles offer ample taper to properly fit the axe head, it helps to bring the axe head with you to size up the “eye” with a few handles.

- Density: Examine the “doe's foot” (the holding end of the handle) and make sure the lines or growth rings in the wood are many and running as straight as possible. The handle is less likely to split during use if the growth rings are close together and oriented in parallel straight lines.

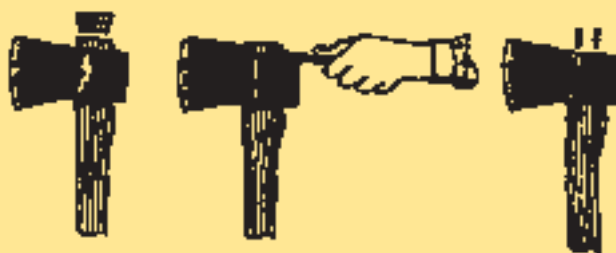
Hang a new handle.

Insert the new handle into the axe head and drive the handle into the eye as far as possible, preferably within a quarter inch of the handle shoulder. When driving the handle in, hold the axe and handle upright and firmly tap the flat end of the doe's foot on a hard level surface. The weight of the axe head will gradually “seat” itself onto the handle. Once the head is down to where you want it, use a hacksaw blade to remove all but a quarter inch of excess handle sticking out the top.



Insert wedges.

Most axe handles will come with a large wooden wedge taped to the end. You should buy two small metal wedges found in the axe-handle section of your hardware store. Hold the axe with the doe's foot on a hard, flat surface. Drive the large wooden wedge into the seam at the top of the handle as far as possible. The wedge can go down below the eye of the axe head, but shouldn't go deeper than a quarter inch. Saw off the remaining handle sticking from the top. To further secure the handle, pound the two small metal wedges into the eye at a 45° angle to the wooden wedge. The metal wedges will tighten the wood in the eye even more. ⚒



Editor's Note:

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